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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/18/2017
TAGS: PREL PGOV GR CY
SUBJECT: GREEK POLITICIANS -- RIGHT AND LEFT -- TURN OUT FOR CLERIDES

Classified By: Political Counselor Robin Quinville. Reason: 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Greek politicians from both government and opposition parties formed part of an overflow crowd at an October 17 event in honor of former Cypriot President Clerides. Two former prime ministers -- Mitsotakis and Simitis -- defended Greece's past handling of the Cyprus problem and criticized (if obliquely) the Papaopoulos government. The audience included curent FM Bakoyannis, prominent PASOKies, as well as former Cypriot FM (and current Presidntial candidate) Kassoulides. The event illustated the complicated impact of the Cyprus probem on Greek politics. Both major political parties feel they must defend past decisions, underscore on-going support for Cyprus, and highlight their pro-solution credentials. And both parties also tend to leave any criticism of the current Cyprus government to retired politicians. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Former New Democracy PM Mitsotakis praised past Greece-Cprus cooperation that resulted in Cyprus's EU etry without preconditions. Unfortunately for the Cyprus problem, Mitsotakis said, President Clerides had not been able to remain President to "finish the job." If Clerides had remained in office, things would have turned out differently. Calling the Annan plan "history," Mitsotakis stated that the Greek-Cypriot veto "must be respected." But he urged that efforts to find a solution continue; in a reference to their ages, Mitsotakis suggested to Clerides that they both live long enough to see Cyprus re-united.

¶3. (C) Former PASOK PM Simitis recalled his "common efforts" with Clerides to pave the way for a solution. In a jab at current Cypriot President Papadopoulos, Simitis suggested that, since its entry, Cyprus "has been losing credibility within the EU." Developments following the Greek-Cypriot rejection of he Annan plan "did not favor Cyprus" (he cited the danger of a "Taiwan solution"). Simitis noted that, during the Annan Plan negotiations, Papadopoulos had not expressed objections nor made alternative proposals. However, Simitis blamed both Papadopoulos and Talat for the July 8 agreement's lack of results. Simitis believed the EU card remained key, but reminded the audience that some in the EU might prefer to leave the Cyprus problem unsolved to keep Turkey from entry. The Greek Cypriot side needed to take the initiative, make proposals, and show it was ready to solve the problem.

¶4. (C) Former President Clerides spoke only briefly. He emphasized that he had written his book not to criticize others but to show the conditions at the time and the possibilities it had offered. He was flanked by former Cypriot FM and presidential candidate Kassoulides, who made the most of his opportunity to mingle with Greek politicians from both government and opposition.

COUNTRYMAN